



**YOU ARE HERE
2020**

Dear readers,

This year's issue of "You Are Here" was the result of many hours of hard work and dedication. We would like to thank the staff and wits of our adviser, Mr. B Neumire. We would also like to thank Mr. Hyatt and Ms. Ashman, who collected terrific art submissions to make our lives easier.

If you submitted your work to our magazine but do not find it within these pages, do not be discouraged. We received many more submissions than this issue could hold and we encourage you to submit new pieces next year. Work with your English teachers on improving your writing and follow the instructions below.

SUBMISSIONS FOR NEXT YEAR

We are open for submissions for next year as of right now! If you are submitting text (poetry, fiction, or nonfiction), please make sure you have it saved on a Google Doc somewhere and email it to Mr. Neumire at bneumire@fabiuspompey.org. In addition to dropping off a hard copy in room 139, Mr. Neumire's room, put your name only on the back of the page.

If you are submitting artwork, please give it to Mr. Hyatt and Ms. Ashman. They will give you more instructions if they are needed.

If you don't want your piece cut, please make sure it is school appropriate, proof-read, and creative!

If you would like to join the literary magazine staff, we highly encourage it! You will need to have Wednesdays after school available. You should be ready to edit, type, and review submissions for publication.

You Are Here staff members:

James Yomtob (President)
Kalysta Donaghy-Robinson (Vice President)
Haley Schramm (Secretary)
Gin Gresock (Treasurer)

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Untitled

Imagine a man without a single flaw,
As if you made this person on the Sims.
A rare occurrence I have one time saw.
This one exquisite man had golden limbs.

You may think that this man cannot exist,
Until you turn and see his short-cut hair
Calling to you with its two swirls that twist
And turn and trap you in a numbing flair.

-Eric Beardslee



Sonnet :(

Is this the thing that makes the world go round?
Is this the thing that makes the fools go mad?
Is this the thing that left the hero's bound?
Is this the thing that makes the liars glad?

Is this the thing that we mistake for lust?
Is this the thing that brought Apollos fall?
Is this the thing that Austen called a must?
Is this the thing that's wanted by us all?

Is this the thing that Romeo died for?
Is this the thing that ruined Guinevere?
Is this the thing that makes us all want more?
Is this the thing that we, creation, revere?

The love the people never get to hold,
Is it the very thing that makes them bold?

-Melissa Frazee





Ode to Photographs

My heart aches when I look at you,
Reminding me of time now past,
All my old memories now brand new
Like immortal songs that forever last.

You hold all the people I love,
Sayings I long to memorize.
Your presence is that of a pure dove,
Whom is always by my side.

When times get rough,
I look to you.
When I miss them,
I look to you.
When I am lost,
I look to you.

My antidote for melancholic afternoons is always found in you.
When I long to escape this idle town,
I look at you and yearn for the wonders you show me.
You open me up and show me places I will never see
Tell me about things I will never do
Show me the faces and ways of people I will never know.

The best times of my life you hold,
Like a freeze frame from my brain and heart.
Everything that has ever taken my breath away is preserved perfectly for me.
The way the light fell upon the trees, deep in the woods that crisp November day.
The memories from nights I long never to forget, the faces of people I swear I will never lose
contact with.
You make me complete, fill in the blanks, remind me of better times.
My life perfectly composed in a book of you.

You are me, I am you.

-Julia Petersen



The Roads To Finding My Way

Exit 50S. I flick on my turn signal and swing around to route twelve. The gas station appears to be vacant of all humanity. As I squeeze the nozzle in my hand, I start to tremble over my thoughts while the gas flows into my car. I can't believe I'm actually doing this. I've driven two hours from Fabius to reach the St. Lawrence river gas station. I have two hours remaining until I arrive at my family friend's lake house in Ontario, Canada. What will I do if I can't get through customs at the border alone? I've come too far to turn back now. The click of the nozzle shuts off and pulls me back into reality. I take a deep breath, start my engine, and cruise towards the Canadian border. Since I was fourteen, I've worked to buy a car that could take me anywhere I desired. Now I have that, and that's exactly what I'm doing.

A large "Canadian Border" sign appears. I'm here. When it becomes my turn in line, I take a deep breath. This is the moment I dreaded most. Customs. I fear that I'll be sent back home. The gentleman scans my information with his eyes and nods. I worried about that moment for no reason. The red gate that dangles before my car disappears. I cruise forward onto the unexplored Canadian roads that await me.

The first half of my trip was effortless, but now it's complicated. My cell phone plan doesn't allow me to call or use a GPS within Canada. No phone. Just me. With two hours left to drive, I tape my hand written directions to the dash. As I approach the town of Westport, I look off into the distance. There are dark mountains hovering over the town with a winding road wedged them. I cross the bridge that lays above the glistening water but below the dark mountains.

Did I pass it? Did I take a left instead of a right? The turn must be around this bend. I repeat the directions: "Road 32. Road 32. " I pull over and reach for my phone, but I remember I can't contact anyone. This is what I feared all along. I'm lost. What am I going to do? I haven't seen a town or gas station in miles. I wish I could message my family friends because I'm going to be late. I let my car idle for a moment while I think. Road thirty two has to be here somewhere. I've followed the directions. My eyes are quickly scanning the road for a sign, but there aren't any. I've studied every sign I've passed. I dry my eyes, take a deep breath, and put my car in drive. An intersection is coming into focus in the distance. Please let road thirty two be there.

"Road 32" Finally. I sigh in relief and smile. I've never been so happy to see a road sign. I'm so grateful that I decided to continue on that road. I found it. I glance at my directions to see that I'm almost there. I can do this.

My directions say that the driveway is on the left. There's only a narrow dirt path with overgrown shrubs. I turn around and drive up the road again. Finally, I decide to drive down the path. I come to a clearing where a house stands tall with the number 145 on the door. I made it.

Almost six hours later, but I'm here. I put my car in park and sit here. A huge smile stretches itself across my face. I did it. The voyage home was going to be long, but I'm not scared. It would be another adventure. I actually look forward to it, because I know that someday or somehow I will always find my way.

-Megan Purcell





She lost the universe within her eyes.
She lost the world within her waves.
she lost the soul within her being.

Lost by Rayn Hurlbert
Photograph by Cassie Skeelee

Thy Ice Cream

The first smooth bite of delicious ice cream.
The flavor, Oh the beautiful flavor,
The taste in my mouth like a sweet sweet dream.
It is something that I must just savor.

With many choices here's my flavor tip,
While cookie dough was my first love and kiss,
I must confess that mint chocolate chip
On certain occasions is my special mistress.

Other bad counterfeits may do for some,
But for me none of this frozen yogurt.
Or when they give gelato to a bum,
I feel so bad, and sad, and very hurt.

Though ice cream is not the healthiest food,
'Tis the one and only love of this dude.

-Jamey Andrews





Confidence Matters

Splash. In I went, feet first, or in my case, fin first right into the clearest lake I'd ever seen. It felt like I was sinking slowly and steadily. Five feet... ten feet... and finally thirty feet. The water was clear as crystal. If I was looking into the water from the top, I could probably see the bottom. The colorful fish and the different plants were remarkable. As I was giving my hand signals to my dad who was right next to me, I was thinking, one year ago I was petrified of the water.

It was Wednesday, May 8th, 2013 to be exact. I walked into a small building, not creepy or anything. A man in his wetsuit was waiting for my dad and I. We sat in a small room before we got in the water. It felt like school but without teachers. There were twelve people in the room, including my dad and I. My fears were alleviated for three weeks while we took notes in a workbook. I was anxious to get in the water, but I didn't want to rush it. It's better if you know the material and then try, rather than being clueless and getting seriously hurt.

Finally, the day came. We were going to get in the water. I was standing by the edge of the pool. I was terrified. My emotions were getting the best of me. We began to go down the curved steps into the shallow part of the pool. For a couple of weeks, we were working on diving fundamentals in the shallow end. Then we made our way into the deep end. My confidence was building. I finally could swim! As we dove down deeper in the pool, I was starting to get nervous, but the instructor helped me through it.

In the beginning, scuba diving was really difficult, but then it got so much easier. My breathing was rapid at first, but then I became more confident, and my breathing calmed down. Once I got comfortable, I began to focus better. It's not easy learning a lot in only a couple weeks, but I did great. Before the 8 weeks were done, I got to pick out my fins, snorkel, and mask. I was committed to scuba diving.

At the end of the course, we went to Alexandria Bay to dive in real water. I began to sink down into the water, five feet... ten feet... And finally thirty feet. I was so proud of myself. I thought I would never be able to swim or even dive as well as I did. It is such a different world underwater. As I was watching all of the colorful fish swim by, I began to smile. As I began to ascend upwards, my movement was slow and steady just like the instructor showed me. If you move very fast, then your lungs will expand and explode. A lot of serious injuries have happened because of ascending fast. Once I got to the top, it felt like a weight was lifted off of me. I finally did it. On July 21, 2013 I got my scuba diving certification card. A lot of people don't get this experience of a lifetime like I did. I believe that if you are determined to do something, then go ahead and do it. I learned never to give up or never to say I can't. I will always know that I can.

-Amelia Gleason





Great Things

Everyone sit down and listen to what I'm about to say
15 now and I'm gonna be great someday
I know I won't do it alone, people will help along the way
And to those people when I'm great I will repay
I want to do great things because I have great thoughts
I want to have success and money and donate to *Toys for Tots*
In order to be great I have to start in this spot
15 years young with my sights on the dot
I know what I got to do let me list them off:
I gotta stay focused, I gotta stay smart
I need to notice that even now I'm playing a part
Even if the world tears me apart
Even if I'm beaten down broken and forever scarred
Remember that my dreams are never too far
With that in mind I gotta dream big; I gotta dream hard
Even if I fall or fail I'm never sub-par
Keep in mind some great advice-- You are who you are
You play with the cards that you're dealt
You live with all the doubt that you've felt
There's nothing to be done about all the screams and the yell
A kid's environment doesn't have to raise a kid well
My dad loves to say, "There's no such thing as luck, look at me and you shall see"
I say, "Dad I disagree, you're lucky because you have me."
He said, "Son, I love you but you alone cannot fix me."
Spoken like a wise man of years 23 looking to succeed
Look forward 20 more and the image will seem obscene
Now a raging alcoholic whose urine is never clean
In another 20 all that's seen is black
For my father will have died from the nutrients that he lacked
And from his bad liver that's constantly attacked
And I said 20 years, but more realistically it's half of that

And I guess that's the theme of this track
Everyone in my life's had an impact
Someone had an impact on them before that
Whether it was good or bad I can't say for a fact
But I can say for certain that my life's intact
And I can say I'm happy despite all the bad
I can say that my life's stable, not because my environment is, but because
the people are instead
These are the people helping along the way like I said
They're the one getting repaid before I'm dead
I said I want to be great, well these people made my head
They keep me focused the way I'm supposed to be
The keep me smart the way they supposed I'd be
It's hard to explain the influence they've imposed on me
Sometimes it feels like they only want me to succeed
They know better than anyone that I was born to be great and to do great
things.

-James Yomtob





Untitled

There once was a boy from Nickelside. He would have been considered an introvert, since he spent most of his time either at school, on the days he decided to go, or imprisoned in his home. He resided at 4 Bridge Street, roughly a mile and a half outside of town. His house was a white three-story gothic in the middle of expansive farm fields that have been dormant for years. It was mostly run down and only kept up with the basic necessities: a decently cut lawn for the patches of grass still remaining, a partially-rotted stoop leading up to a freshly painted purple door with a hole above the ornate knocker, and six nicely polished windows facing the winding, empty road. This house stood as a landmark of the area, as it was the only standing thing within a mile in any direction. The landscape the boy called home was an infertile wasteland with patches of grass scattered about between the enormous mud pits and a single dying oak tree a stone's throw away from the boy's bedroom window.

The boy had almost come to terms with his eternal damnation to that god-forsaken slice of no-where, but a small selection of activities made the boy's dreadful life just bearable. The first was his obsession with the universe. This did not just incorporate space, planets and galaxies, but a deeper philosophical question: why? Why did he have to live in such a place if he dreamed of better, why is his only companion a dying tree when he prayed for a friend, and most importantly, why did he have to be a tall, skinny, slender-man type of nine year old who was mocked for being different? The boy also liked to take long, meandering walks around the property. Occasionally he would run into a rabbit or a fox or a squirrel but the boy had no interest in them. He would just walk on past, oblivious to the living creatures for which he could have shared some companionship, if only for a little while. But no, these walks had one sole purpose: to imagine himself with the girl of his dreams.

This girl could have been his polar opposite. She lived in the middle of town, next to a movie theatre and an Italian restaurant. Her house was a quaint, two-story modern piece of architecture probably built within the last twenty years or so. She had no trouble

in any sense of the word. She was nice, charismatic, loved by all, athletic, smart, and very talkative. She would come into school every day with a smile on her face and a heartfelt greeting tailored to every kid in the hallway. The teachers adored her as she sat front and center in every class, asked the perfect questions and gave nice holiday presents. Every Friday, she would walk into the Italian restaurant next to her house and receive a free cannoli because the owners were family friends. She would sit on the curb and eat the cannoli while doing her ELA homework.

All the other fourth grade boys tried to charm her with small gifts or actions like picking up her dropped eraser or giving her a nice drawn picture, or as nice of a doodle as a 4th grade boy could sketch. But these same boys would then go out to the playground and beat up the runts to impress the girl. One mid-spring day, the boys gathered around the skinny, long-legged boy who was sitting on a bench staring into nothing. The horde mocked the boy for his large stature and poor looking clothes, but he showed no emotion, at least until the fists and feet started connecting with his frail body. Then he felt the pain, but it was not the first time he would go home bruised and bloodied. The teachers were on the other side of the yard, the only person who came to the boy's aid was his crush. The horde of boys parted for the girl and stopped on her command. She scolded them for being so mean and violent. All the boys listened because they didn't want her to hate them and dispersed with incredible speed. The girl came to the boy's aid and helped him off the ground. In that instant, the two made the slightest eye contact, but it was enough. The boy saw the true inner beauty of the girl and the girl saw through the boy's facade, into his emotion driven heart.

The two did not speak much of that moment, but they started to sit next to each other in class. They talked in the halls and on the sidewalk on the way home. However, nothing more came at this time, because it was unmanly to like someone in 4th grade, so the two stayed as close friends. This friendship matured throughout the rest of the schooling. They started "dating" in the acceptable grade 7 and shared their first kiss as freshman. Life looked to be going in the right direction for both of them, the girl continued her studies and also became an all-state volleyball player. The boy grew into

his slender frame and started to get more sociable. By their senior year, the couple were at the top of the class, both academically and socially. Those hordes of hooligans that kicked the boys butt back in elementary school now bowed down to him because he was dating the hottest girl in the grade. However, all good things must come to an end, the couple split up as they went to different colleges. The girl was going to a fancy private school in New England while the boy was going to a small state school close to home. They split as friends though, they still could cherish all of their memories. From countless movies and cannolis to early-morning star gazing.

The boy went on to graduate from college with a business degree and land a spot at a big financial consulting firm in NYC. He was finally able to have the life he wanted, except for the most important part, the love of his life. The girl was less fortunate. The big college changed her. She transformed into a huge-party girl who didn't care about her grades. By the end of her 2nd semester, she was kicked out due to her 0.2 GPA and underage drinking charges. She fell into a deeper pit of despair when she became addicted to meth and was cut off from her parents. The two lost contact after this point, but the girl's situation hurt the boy so he moved on.

Years past, the boy was promoted to become a head executive of his firm, but he could never find love again. On the other hand, the girl stayed in her isolated pit of despair. She did take odd jobs here and there to pay for her drugs. She slowly made her way out of the northeast picking up rides when she could or walking when she couldn't. She floated from motel to motel as the money ran out each month. She eventually found herself in a small trailer park in a town 40 minutes outside of NYC. She was working as a waitress in the diner off the highway. She has gone to rehab twice in the past 2 years but still can't contain her demons. At least until he walked in.

The man was going to see a client in Pittsburg and stopped at a diner for lunch before his meeting. A cute waitress came up to him to ask his order, something felt familiar about her appearance, but after living in the Big Apple for 8 years, he has seen many beautiful faces. He gets his food, a bacon cheeseburger with fries, and eats it

fairly quickly because he has to get going. When the waitress comes back, he can tell he knows the girl from somewhere. He asks her for her name and is surprised to find it was his old angel. He asks her what time she gets off, and it just so happens to be when he will be returning from his meeting. The man returns from his meeting and takes the woman to NYC. They walk into a fancy steak house as the man says it's on him. The two talk for what seemed like ages as they chow down on delicious steaks. The man tells of his rise to riches in the financial world but is disappointed when the woman tells her story. He tells her that she can stay with him until she gets back on her feet.

The man convinces his ex love to go back to rehab for her drug addiction. Within the year, she is drug free. In this time, they manage to rekindle their past love. It is not exactly the same as it was in high school, but it never is. One night after a few months of dating, while walking down the street, the man asks the woman to marry him. The question is out of left field, but it is certainly the right time because the man got another promotion, he is now the corporate vice president of his firm, and the woman just got a job as a 4th grade teacher at a school in Queens. The woman ponders the question as they continue to walk but eventually gives in and accepts. The couple spend some time after their marriage working. They are trying to save up to start a family. Even though they are pretty wealthy, more money is always needed. After a year of trying, it is discovered that the man is sterile, but that doesn't faze the couple. And then one night, everything changed when the wife coughed up blood.

She was rushed to the hospital, but she went into cardiac arrest on the way. The EMT's managed to bring her back, but she remained unconscious. After the wife was stabilized, an x-ray was taken of her chest, and a tumor the size of a tennis ball was found in her lung. There was nothing the doctors could do at this point, until one surgeon told the husband of a new, experimental surgery that could remove the tumor from the side of her lung. The husband agreed to it and the wife was rushed into emergency surgery. She powered through and miraculously, most of the tumor was removed by the surgical team, however, now came the hard part. She had to get Chemo and radiation therapy to get rid of the rest of the tumor. This time showed the

resilience of the husband as he watched over her. He stayed by her side as she got sick, and helped her when she got really sick. He was almost fired from his job because he took too many sick days, but he stayed by his wife's side through thick and thin. The wife was declared cancer free a year and a half after her tumor was discovered.

Life went back to normal, or as normal life can be after almost dying numerous times. A few more years passed on, the wife loved her job and students and treated them all like the kids she could never have. The man pushed his firm to have the best set of years the company has ever had. It was at this point the couple wanted to have kids again. Since they couldn't have their own, they decided to adopt a child. The couple went down to the adoption center and met with many young children to find one that would be perfect for them. They eventually found a young boy who was given up by his single mother who could no longer support him. He was a very nice, young boy, but you could tell there was a piece missing from his heart. After signing the paperwork, the couple took him home and accepted him as their own.

Life with their new son was pretty good. The couple taught him to be kind and appreciative. He started elementary school and was reading 5th grade books by 2nd grade. Things were looking up. The son made many new friends. As his schooling continued his intelligence came out. He was able to skip 4th and 5th grade and went to middle school at 9. His teachers loved his drive for higher knowledge. He was also athletic for his age and started playing basketball, which he picked up very fast.

He even found a soul mate his freshman year. The boy's parents approve of her because she reminded the couple of the wife when she was young. Life seemed up for the family until one snowy, January day. The father was taking the boy home from a basketball tournament in Albany and drove back to NYC on highway 9 along the Hudson. The car hit a patch of black ice. And skidded across the median, through the barrier and into the Hudson many feet below. By the time help arrived, the car had been under for almost 20 minutes and neither the man or the son had surfaced, it was clear they would not wake up from the eternal dirt nap. The wails heard from the couple's

apartment in the upper east side could have risen the dead. The wife was so distraught from the loss of her son and husband she turned to heavy drinking. She stopped going to see the students she cared so much about only a month prior, and as her sadness worsened, she turned back to drugs to keep her emotions at bay.

After being fired from her job and losing the apartment, she was forced to move. She ended back up in her old Nickelside home which she had inherited after her parents died many years ago. However, this would be the first time she would be back since leaving for college what seemed like a lifetime ago. The halls of her childhood dwelling were bleak and deserted. The town where she was raised had fallen to pieces. The Italian restaurant where she had her first date with her ex love had closed and lay dormant. The movie theatre had been cleared and an empty lot lay across from her old house. As she lumbered down what was left of main street, memories of her old life flooded back. All the good times shared with that tall, scrawny kid. Picnics in that park and hours of foosball in that arcade.

She snapped out of her trance about a mile and a half outside of town in front of an old, 3-story gothic house, his old, 3-story gothic house. It was in ruins. The boy's parents moved away after he went to college and were never heard from again. The woman wandered outback and came across the old oak tree. It was dead, or on the verge of death, except for the single leaf still stuck on the highest branch. A wave of emotion washed over the poor widow. She had lost everything of value to her; her husband, her son, her job, her family, her students. She knew what she had to do as she entered the boy's old house looking for an instrument of death. In the boy's old room, in the closet filled with pictures of planets and galaxies lies among other things, unfinished lego sets, unopened books and a knotted rope. She climbed the oak tree up to a branch that could support her, the hard core drugs flowing through her veins repressed any sense of logic as she tied a knot around the sturdy branch. She didn't flinch as the loop tightened around her neck. On the edge of the void, her husband's voice called her name. He said to jump and join her family. She couldn't resist. Her whole life flashed before her eyes, a kiss, a tumor, a son, a soul mate. SNAP! No one

heard the rope go taught, no one saw the life leave her eyes, In that instant she was eternally alone.

-Trevor Clarkson





Death's Only Lament

I took over America silently and swiftly, like falling into comatosis as the sun rose.
I entered with a sigh into the concrete jungle, an impenetrable iron fort.
No person or thing there suspected me, I suppose,
I was there to cut thousands of lives short.
On this day September 11th. I would show America its doom.
The people around me shuffled into the buildings, like lambs to the slaughter.
As soon as the clock strikes 8:45 it will all begin with a boom.
I almost felt a shred of remorse, for a man had just ended a call with his daughter,
but this was my job and I had no control over human beings turned manic.
I closed my eyes, and couldn't imagine those towers with big gaping holes,
then all of a sudden the plane hit, I could sense the horrid panic.
My duty had started rapidly, I had to collect the devastated souls.
On that day, I, myself, death, learned I could feel melancholy too,
For that dreaded day I collected 2,996 souls, a lot of them just like you.

-Julia Petersen



Sub-Genetic: Part II

No one really knows what happens when you die. Some people say that you go to heaven or to hell depending on the deeds that you did during your life. Other people will tell you that when a person dies, they'll be reincarnated to live another life. There are some people in this world that think death is just the end, and after life there's nothing. Just blackness. These people will tell you that we live to die and that life has no point. All these propositions and suggestions about death, but no concrete answers. These were the things that I was thinking of as I knelt down next to Andrea's limp, cold body. I didn't know what I had subjected my best friend to. It was an accident. I didn't want to hurt anybody, but she wouldn't stop running. I just wanted to explain to her that I didn't mean to kill that thug in the alley. I didn't mean to scare her away.

I knelt near her and looked down at her body for a long time. Tears ran down my face and into the corners of my mouth. The taste of salt filled my mouth bitterly but the taste was somewhat comforting at the same time. As my eyes got puffy and sore from crying I had to take my eyes off of Andrea's body and hang my head. I closed my eyes for a long time, thinking.

I wasn't sure how much time had passed when I first heard her voice, but it must've been hours because when I opened my eyes, the sun was going down. I hadn't fallen asleep, every thought that I had was conscious, but I must've lost myself in thoughts of death; of guilt. It was her voice that brought me out of my thoughts. When I opened my eyes, Andrea was there, alive as she could have looked considering the fact that she was standing next to her own dead corpse.

"You are a pathetic piece of crap," was the statement that yanked me from my thoughts. I looked up at Andrea in complete bewilderment.

"What?" I said lamely.

"You heard me," she retorted, meanly. "You kill me and then sit there and cry about it for hours? If you're this messed up about killing me, imagine how I feel about you killing me."

"Umm-" I had no words, Andrea's words and tone were more surprising to me than the fact she was talking. I looked up at her and we locked eyes, and the corners of her mouth started to twitch. Her eyes seemed to be watering. A moment passed, then she exploded... into laughter. It was a satisfied and hearty laugh, one that gave me the impression of a clown playing a joke on a 4-year-old.

"I'm just kidding," she said, doubled-over and wiping her eyes. "You should see your face, it's priceless, truly." Despite the confusion and utter bewilderment, Andrea's laugh was infectious. I started to laugh as well. Before long her and I were laughing together again like everything was normal, or at least normal to our standards. When the laughing died down, I looked at Andrea seriously.

"Andrea, what's going on?" I asked as the sounds of sirens started to fill the air in the background.

"What do you mean?" she replied, distractedly.

"What do you mean, what do I mean!?" I was angry and frustrated, but I didn't know exactly why. "You're dead! That's your dead body right there, so how are you talking to me?"

"First of all, don't get upset at me, you're the one who killed me, remember? And second, if that's my corporeal body, then that must mean that I'm--"

"A ghost," I finished, without meaning to say it aloud.

"Right," Andrea confirmed.

"So... you're a ghost?" I asked again.

"Uh... no. I was just messing with you some more. You're actually just dreaming."

Andrea said this nonchalantly, as if it meant nothing to her, but the approaching sirens peaked her attention. "Hear that?" she asked. "That means it's time to go."

"Because you hear police sirens in the heart of a city?" I asked.

"No, because that's a dead body."

"Well if this is a dream what does it matter?" I asked.

"Because those approaching police sirens aren't part of your dream," replied Andrea.

"How do you know that?"

"Because I created this dream, dingus. Now you have to wake up and run, or get caught sleeping on a dead body, your choice. NOW WAKE UP!"

I woke with a start. There was an exploding feeling of fear inside my stomach. Andrea was right, the sirens had persisted despite the fact I was conscious. They were getting closer, and I was frozen with panic. As sirens got closer and closer, my senses started to come back to me. As the lights of police vehicles became visible, I was again able to move. I turned and ran down the alley as fast as could. As I was running I looked to my right and saw a fire escape on the wall of a building. It was too high to reach so I had to use my ability and pull it down. I raised my arm and the ladder came down almost immediately. With the sirens still closing in, I climbed the ladder as fast as possible and reached the first landing of the fire escape. I stopped there and doubled-over, desperately trying to catch my breath. Then I heard the screeching of brakes and looked down to the ground. There were 2 police officers getting out of their car and raising their guns. With the guns pointed at me, the police officers fired 3 rounds. I flinched hard and raised my arm. The bullets stopped just before they hit me. I was as surprised as the officers looked. I thought fast and pushed my other arm out back towards the cops and sent the bullets flying in that direction. One bullet hit an officer in the shoulder, but the other 2 missed wildly. With the confusion of what had just happened distracting the cops, I turned and ran up the fire escape at full speed until I made it to the roof of the building. I stopped there and pondered my next move.

My thoughts were interrupted after only a few seconds of waiting. The odd part was that it seemed like my thoughts were interrupted by thoughts inside my head that weren't my own. It was a voice, a loud, booming, baritone voice inside my head. It felt very familiar but I couldn't remember where I had heard it before.

"Good, very good," it said. *"You're learning, and you're learning fast. You're getting stronger and faster."* My confusion was immeasurable.

"Who are you?" I said aloud, probably looking crazier than I felt. "And what do you mean *'I'm learning'?*" I got no response, just an uncomfortable silence within my own head. A silence that was soon filled with fear and paranoia.

I decided after some thinking that I must've just imagined the voice and discredited the whole thing as a daydream caused by stress and trauma. The voice I heard was nothing but a figment of my imagination. What really made me come to this conclusion was what the voice had said. It stated the thoughts I'd been having about my powers. The more I used my powers,

the better I got at using them, and I improved more in those last 2 weeks than in my entire life. In the week prior, I could barely crush a can of cola, but now I was stopping speeding bullets and sending them back in the other direction. How long would it be before I was lifting entire cars or holding up entire buildings with the power of my mind?

As more sirens began to draw near I had to quickly think of action. It became clear that the police officers had called for backup and I had no time to think of a competent plan. The best thing I could think of on such short notice was to jump. On the other side of the building, opposite that of which I climbed up, there was an open dumpster that I could smell all the way up on the 50 foot high roof. Though it smelled worse than a port-a-potty that hadn't been cleaned in 10 years, if I jumped in it, it might soften my landing. With this reasoning in mind, I backed from the side of the roof and ran towards the edge. I leapt into the air, but I had put too much power into my jump. I went too far forward and was gonna miss the dumpster(which I would have been happy about if I wasn't facing imminent death upon impact). About halfway through my fall, an idea popped into my head. It was a crazy idea but I had to try to do something. In order to pull this move off, my control, speed, and accuracy had to be absolutely perfect.

I looked at the dumpster and put all my focus into not only moving it, but controlling how much I moved it. I had to estimate how far forward I would go before I hit the ground in order to know where to put the dumpster below me. I quickly made the calculations in my head and moved the dumpster into place just in time. The corner of the dumpster nicked my heel but I fell onto the garbage with a soft, pillowy landing. With a deep sigh of relief, I smiled at the amazing use of my powers, but cringed at the smell of actual death that consumed me as I landed.

The police officers were just around the corner and didn't see me jump, but they would start searching the surrounding alleys very soon. I couldn't risk being seen, so I used my power to move the dumpster back to its original position. It moved with surprising ease. Once the dumpster was back in position I used my power once more to close the lid. It got dark immediately, but even though the sun was blocked it must have gotten 15 degrees warmer in the dumpster. It became really difficult to breathe, I focused hard on taking long, deep breaths, slow and controlled. One minute passed and my breathing started to speed up and my head became very light. After 2 minutes I was hyperventilating and my shirt was covered in sweat. The smell was so bad it burned my nose hairs, it felt like my nose was melting. I could still hear sirens and focused hard on the sound. I only had to stay in that dumpster for as long as the cops stayed in the alley.

Another minute passed and I saw three shadows pass the dumpster through the crack between the left and right lid. They had to have been police searching the area for me. They must have been searching pretty half-heartedly though, because they didn't ever think to check in the dumpster. My heart rate increased only half a beat per minute while in the presence of the cops, but once their shadows crossed the dumpster the second time I relaxed. A minute later, the sirens that had persisted for the entirety of my trashy game of hide and seek, started to move away from the alley. As they became more distant, I decided it was safe to leave the dumpster. I sat up and lifted the lid with my hand.

Fresh air filled my lungs immediately and I felt liberated. I took a deep breath in and an even deeper breath out. The sunlight stung my eyes despite the fact it was almost sunset. I scrambled out of the dumpster and ran out of the alley being very careful to stay hidden from

any police car that happened to be near. I headed in the direction of home. It was the only place I could think of to go. I ran all the way out of the city and once I was approximately 3 miles from home, I slowed to a walk and thought about what I was doing. I couldn't go home, my mom knew I went to the city with Andrea and would know she had been killed if she was watching the news, which she undoubtedly was. Going home was out of the question for me, so what could I do? Where could I hide? I wandered for an hour or two and decided to make my way back to the city. There I would be able to find a relatively insignificant bridge and sleep under there for a while. It was very dark and I was very tired. In the morning I figured the only logical action for me to take was to walk north on the highway until I was well out of the city.

It took me another hour to find a decent and indistinct bridge on the outskirts of the city. It was riddled with garbage and graffiti, but it was a shelter. I layed down on the hard cement below the bridge and tried my best to let sleep fall over me, but it didn't come for a long time. The bridge was very busy with cars; it felt like they would never stop coming. I sat up frustrated and thought about things. Events from the day started to sink in. *I actually killed people today... Now I'm on the run from the cops and can never go home.* I started to cry. I started to cry hard. I wept and I sobbed for a long time, or at least it felt like it was a long time. I sobbed until it felt like I had no more tears left. Then I layed down once again and closed my eyes. They were closed for about ten minutes and when sleep never came I opened them again. This time, however, Andrea was standing right next to me, she had her hands on her hips and a sassy look on her face.

"I see *you* got away from the cops just fine," she said. She put emphasis on the word "you," as if she was upset that I was okay.

"Yeah, *I* did, no thanks to you," I retorted. I mimicked her emphasis with my own, and she raised her eyebrows at my words and shifted her hips from her left to her right.

"You killed me, which as far as I'm concerned, takes away any right to any sass you were able to give me." I said nothing back to her. She was right, I did kill her. Which was still really hard for me to believe seeing as she was standing right in front of me, seemingly as healthy as she was when she was alive.

"Hey," I said, breaking the silence between us that I hadn't even realized was there. "Can you explain to me again how you're standing right in front of me?" Andrea sighed, giving off the impression of annoyance. She seemed as if being in my presence was the last place she wanted to be.

"I'm not *actually* right in front of you, that would be absurd. I'm your dream. You fell asleep, and your subconscious dreamed me up." Andrea stated this in a matter-of-fact type of tone. I looked at her, baffled.

"So," I started, extending the syllable. "... you don't exist. You're not real, you're just a figment of my imagination, of my mind."

"Right," she confirmed. "You're about to wake up, so I have to leave, but before I go I want to tell you something very important."

"What? What do you need to say?" Andrea paused after I spoke then opened her mouth to speak.

"I can only ever be as real as you want to make me," she said. Then she faded into black without another word. I sat there dumbfounded, but I had little time to ponder this because the rest of the world around me was now fading into black. I watched until the ground

below me was engulfed and once it was I started to fall. I was falling deeper and deeper into the blackness. I fell for a very long time and when I stopped falling it was very sudden. Then a voice began speaking. It was a loud, booming voice that seemed to engulf me in its power.

She'll only ever be as real as you want to make her.

It was the same voice that spoke to me on the roof. It still sounded familiar, and I still couldn't remember where I had heard it before. I started falling suddenly again as if someone had cut the invisible string suspending me in the air. After a very quick descent, a platform of cement came into view, but just before I hit it, I woke up.

My eyes snapped open, but immediately started to burn due to the brightness of the sun. I sat up and pondered the odd dream I had. *She can only ever be as real as you want to make her.* What did that mean? I didn't feel like she could've been anymore real than a dream since she died. Since I killed her. The sound of a siren interrupted my thoughts. It went right over the bridge that I was under and I immediately got to my feet.

The siren crossed the bridge quickly and within seconds the sound of the siren faded. Nevertheless, I needed to start moving. The plan was to find the highway leading north and walk to the next city without being seen by the police, but before I left the city, I needed to see Andrea's body 1 more time. I don't know what it was that made me feel this way, but I had an overwhelming urge to go back to the body.

I started to walk out from under the bridge and back into the middle of the city. The city was very big and it had a lot of streets, many streets meant many alleys, many alleys meant many hours of searching for the right one. Not to mention even more close calls with the police. However, while looking for the alley in which Andrea's body lay, I noticed something else that was familiar. The day was sunny and hot, but it felt gray and dull. It was damp, though it had not rained. It was like this on the prior Thursday and Friday, but not yesterday. Now the odd weather was back. Peculiar as it was, I needed to find the alley that I was looking for, so I dismissed the thought.

Finally, after what felt like forever, I found the alley. A rush of exhilaration came over me as the familiarity of the street sank in, however the alley was different than it had been the day prior. Yellow police tape blocked off the entrance of the alley that was closest to me and beyond that I could see at least 3 police cars with their lights flashing. I saw no actual cops, but my fear mounted still. My determination to see Andrea's body one last time before I left was stronger than my fear of being caught by the police, so despite myself, I walked forward, towards the alley entrance. With every step that I took toward the police tape, my next step became more attentive and careful. Each step seemed to have multiplied my heart rate ten fold. Upon reaching the tape, the sound of police scanners filled my ears. The radios seemed really busy, as if they never stopped firing. The radios transfixed me; I listened to them closely trying to get a piece of what they were saying. I craned my neck as if that would affect the way I heard the radios. After a few moments of desperately trying to make out something comprehensible I came to a stunning realization. It seemed like the reason nothing that the police scanners said made sense was because the channel would change mid-sentence. Yes! That was it! Right when the operator seemed to be about to say something interesting or important, or something that would help me with my situation, it would cut out, and then a different operator would start

talking. Not only that, but there seemed to be a pattern as to what time the operators cut out, and to which operator spoke next. There were a total of 4 operators and each one said 3 words. Every time it was an operator's turn they only spoke their assigned words.

"...*she'll only ever...*" spoke the first operator.

"...*be as real...*" said the second operator.

"...*as you want...*" the third said.

"...*to make her...*" number four finished. Then it looped back. Number 1 spoke again.

"...*she'll only ever...*" spoke the first operator.

"...*be as real...*" said the second operator.

"...*as you want...*" the third said.

"...*to make her...*" number four finished. Then it looped back. Number 1 spoke again. *She'll only ever be as real as you want to make her.* I was shocked. I couldn't have still been dreaming, right? I actually pinched myself just to make sure. Nothing happened. So then what was happening? How could my dreams have been somehow seeing into reality?

"...*she'll only ever...*" spoke the first operator.

"...*be as real...*" said the second operator.

"...*as you wan--*"

"Hey! Who are you? What're you doin' here? Can't you see the tape, this is a crime scene!" I looked up. There was a cop yelling at me from about 100 meters down the alley. He was walking down the alley towards me with a purpose. He had a sling on and I could see gauze and medical tape just out of the collar of his uniform. It looked like the shoulder with the sling had been heavily wrapped.

"Oh, I, uh, right," I started. "The tape, I was just hoping to get through. I'm really late for, uh, work. Cutting through this alley would have taken about ten minutes off my walk. It's okay though, I'll walk around." Then I hung my head and turned around, trying to look as defeated as possible.

"Wait!" I stopped dead, a smirk crossing my face, proud of my wit and manipulation. "I've seen you before." I turned around, the smirk getting wiped from my face as quickly as it had arrived, and all of the sudden the police officer was at the tape and almost nose to nose with me. Once the officer got a good look at me, his face changed from a resting frown to a terrified silent scream. "S'you," he murmured. "It's you!" he yelled loudly now, terror seeping into his voice. He turned and ran away from me in the direction he came. He was still screaming. He said, "I've found him! I found the suspect!" Panic struck me with the hilt of a steel sword as a dozen cops started running at me from any given direction and every single cop had a gun drawn. One officer, the one with the sheriff's badge, walked up behind me and put the barrel of his shotgun to my spine. I was still facing the tape and the cop cars in the alley, but I was surrounded by men and women in uniform. The sheriff leaned down to speak in my ear.

"On your knees," he said softly. Though it was a soft tone, it was also intimidating and it sent a shiver down my hostage spine. "Hands above your head, do it and I'll think about not

blowing your spine to pieces.” I did as I was told and allowed myself to be handcuffed. There was applause from the police surrounding me as the sheriff picked me up to my feet. I had a plan, but I knew that if I had allotted them time to put me in a Cruiser, I’d be trapped and my plan would have the potential to go horribly wrong, so I acted under the distraction of the applause.

I looked at one of the cop cars in the alley and put all my energy into the stare. With fantastic force the car started to come directly towards me. Once it was completely out of the alley, I flicked my gaze to the cops at my immediate left. The car soared through the air to the left. The cops under the car before it fell scattered just before the Cruiser landed on the road and compressed like an aluminum can. Under the veil of the distraction, the sheriff had loosened his grip on me. I turned around and looked down at the shotgun that was pointed at my spine and flung it out of the sheriff’s hands with my mind. Once it was on the ground I looked at the chest of the sheriff and sent him flying backwards. I turned quickly and flung the car from the alley from my left side to the right side. The cops there scattered and I took this opportunity to escape. I ran toward the police tape and hurdled it with amazing athleticism that I didn’t even know I had. I ran fast toward one of the police cars still there. Still handcuffed, I went over to the passenger side door and flung it open with my mind. I then started to search frantically for a spare set of keys that may be able to remove my restraints. I opened the glove compartment and saw a set of small keys that most certainly were the handcuff keys. I picked those up with my mind as fast as I could and stuck the key into the keyhole of my handcuffs. The left cuff popped open and blood flooded back into my hand so fast it was as if a dam was removed from inside my wrist.

Now with two free hands I could hear the police behind me beginning to compose themselves. I threw the handcuff keys back into the glove box and went to close it, but upon looking into the glove box to make sure the keys made it in, I noticed a second set of keys. I had never driven a car before, and I had never been taught. I’d seen my mom drive all the time though, and it couldn’t have been *that* hard to figure out. Besides, what better time to have learned than right then? I shrugged to myself and snatched the car keys out of the glove box, then I jumped into the passenger seat and shut the door. I pressed the lock button and all the doors locked simultaneously. I leapt the center console with brilliant grace and stuck the key in the ignition and the engine fired at once. I put the car in reverse and floored the gas pedal. The car lurched backward so fast that the cops outside the alley almost didn’t have time to get out of the way. Thankfully, I didn’t hit anyone. I then turned the wheel to the left and the car swung around to the right. I was now parallel with the street instead of the alley so I shifted the police car into drive and floored the gas pedal again. Then I was off into the depths of the city with a flurry of gunshots behind me.

Driving came surprisingly easy to me. It took me about 15 minutes to get myself out of the city and onto the highway, and by that time, everything was already feeling natural to me. I drove smoothly for a few hours, heading north like I had first planned. I didn’t know how far I was going north or how long I’d already traveled, but a few hours into driving, I looked at the gas meter and it was scarily low. I had no money for gas, so when I ran out, I would have had to resort to walking. That didn’t upset me too much though; walking was the original plan anyway, the car was a mere convenience. The car had just about run out of gas just as it started to turn dark. I decided to just sleep in the car on the side of the highway that night. I pulled over and

turned off the car, knowing that I wouldn't be able to turn it back on in the morning. I then climbed into the backseat and closed my eyes.

I opened them barely 2 minutes later and Andrea was sitting in the passenger seat. She must have sensed that I was conscious because she turned around almost as soon as I sat up.

"Let me guess," I said, rubbing my eyes. "I'm asleep?"

"Yep," she replied, tiredly.

"Are you gonna give me any useful information?" I asked, maybe a little more viciously than I had meant to.

"What would I know that you don't?" She asked. "Also information about what? Do you even have a goal?"

"Yeah," I started with a clearly malicious attitude. "It's called not going to prison, or maybe *you* haven't noticed that I'm on the run from the cops. Let me list off the things I could be charged for if I'm caught, let's see: Suspect in 2 homicides, attempted murder of about a dozen cops, obstruction of justice, assaulting a police officer, and now grand theft auto, so *excuse* me for wanting some suggestions as to what I'm supposed to be doing! Or as to why a dead girl keeps popping up in my dreams!" I finished at a loud yell, sweat trickling down my temple, and heavy breathing. I looked up and met Andrea's eyes. She was crying. My heart sank. I couldn't help but feel bad for being upset with her, but I didn't know who else to be upset with. "What's the matter with you?" I asked, softly. She looked up at me with her wide, watery eyes.

"I'm dead?" She said the clear statement in a questionable tone. "You still think I'm dead? Have you thought about what I told you last night at all?"

"*I can only ever be as real as you want to make me.*" I repeated. "You never told me what that meant. What does that mean?"

"Right. I can only ever be as real as you want me to be. So in turn, that would mean that I could only ever have *been* as real as you wanted me to be." I didn't understand.

"What?" I said lamely.

"If I can only ever be as real as you want me to be, then I only ever was as real as you wanted me to be." After she spoke this time, I understood more but not fully.

"So, I only imagined you? Those nights we stayed up talking? The periods in school where we messed around with Keith Plighton? The kiss? I only just imagined all of that? It never actually happened?"

"No. That's not how it works. I existed. I was more real than anyone you could have imagined, because you *did* imagine it. Your want, your longing, your yearning for a companion in your life is what brought me to life. Your thoughts brought me into reality."

"If I brought you to life, how could I have killed you?" I asked. I felt like it was a fair question to ask, but it must have made Andrea really upset, because she began to cry even harder now.

"When you brought me to life, you made me corporeal. You made me killable. I could die, but it didn't have to be dead for good. I could have been as real as you wanted me to be for as long as you wanted me to be real. You brought me to life, but you also kept me dead."

"I kept you dead by not wanting you alive?" I asked, still confused.

"No, you kept me dead by not believing I could come back. Eventually you're gonna stop believing that I exist. Eventually, I won't even be alive in your head, and one night you'll go

to bed and I won't appear in your dreams. One night you'll go to bed and I'll cease to exist... even to you."

I woke. It was a sudden wake up and I sat up, surprised and a little disappointed at the dreamless night. The sun was shining through the right side windows and it was not bright. It was hot and sunny but the world was almost completely gray now. It was as if I was sucked into an old Alfred Hitchcock movie overnight. I got out of the car and noticed that the grass was wet. It wasn't cold enough for the world to have reached dew point, so that meant that the grass was wet for seemingly no reason. The world was completely gray and kept getting wetter. This was stuck in my mind all day.

I attempted to turn the car on only one time and it didn't go. Spirits still far from crushed I began to walk with nothing, up the highway heading northward. Not an hour into my walk, I started to get hungry. Really hungry. It started as a simple pain in my stomach, but it quickly turned violent. It was an awful pain, but I kept walking. It came once, then faded. It came another time, worse than the time before, and then faded again. I persisted and told myself that I'd find food as soon as I found the next rest stop. It was only 5 miles down the road.

As I entered the diner, the smell of breakfast filled my lungs and I went to sit down at the counter. The people next to me were talking about how weird the weather was. This was comforting for me, at least I wasn't going completely crazy.

"What can I get for ya, Hon?" asked a pretty waitress.

"Oh, I, uh, can I just get a belgian waffle?" I suddenly became conscious of the smell that was wafting off of me. *And a shower*, I thought, resentfully.

"Of course," the waitress said back. "Plain?"

"Yes, please."

"Alrighty, that'll be right up."

"Thank you," I said, thankfully. Then the waitress was off to give my order to the chefs. I felt a sudden rush of guilt over what I was about to do. I didn't have any money to pay for a belgian waffle, so as soon as my plate was set down in front of me, and I was sure I wasn't being singularly watched, I snatched the waffle in its entirety off the plate, and ran out the door of the diner. I ran down the road back onto the highway.

I was barely done with the first half of my waffle when I came across a dog on the side of the highway. It was maybe a 4 month old Beagle and it was awfully skinny. Remorse washed over me and I ripped off a quarter of the remaining waffle and handed it gently to the dog, who took it out of my hand tentatively, and then ate it gratefully. Then it looked up at me with its puppy dog eyes. I started to cry. I didn't know why I was crying, but I was. Something about this dog invoked such a strong emotion in me that I felt like I could do nothing else but cry. I sat down and crossed my legs in front of the dog. I pet him for a few minutes and he rubbed up on me, expressing his pleasure. When I got back up he looked up at me longingly, and I looked back at it, contemplating something. After a moment or two I had made up my mind.

"C'mon, boy," I said, patting my thigh, as I kept walking. I had realized he was a boy while I was petting him a moment before. The dog perked up and ran to catch up with me, his ears flopping around in the wind. As he ran towards me he barked, but it was an odd type of bark. It wasn't a traditional "BARK!" but rather, more of a "BOOG!" sound. I chuckled.

“Boog?” I asked the dog. “Is that what you want to be called?” The dog booged at me again. “Boog it is then.” And with that, Boog and I went off, heading north on the highway.

Me and Boog were only a few miles from the nearest city when it was getting dark, so instead of looking for shelter on the side of the highway, I decided to push through the night until we got to the city. Once we got there, we found another bridge, and went to sleep. There were no dreams.

I was awakened the next morning by Boog. He had jumped on my stomach and licked my face. When I opened my eyes I was surprised to see the world completely dry, and it had color again. Hunger pangs struck with force just moments after waking, though, so I decided since we made it to the next city, it was time to look for food. Turns out, a Belgian waffle isn’t enough to feed for a day, much less me and a dog for half a day.

Some time passed while me and Boog attempted to find a place that seemed easy to steal from. We searched for a very long time, and were beginning to become hopeless. *How does this city have no damn restaurants*, I was thinking. However, just when everything seemed lost, I stumbled across a wallet, laying there on the sidewalk of downtown Akron, just about 50 meters down the street. Excitement filled me up, seeming to replace the hemoglobin in my blood, I ran the fifty meters at a dead sprint with Boog close at my heels. Upon reaching the wallet, I picked it up, and the first thing I noticed was the thickness; it was thicker than any wallet I had ever held in my life. As I opened it, another thing very odd grabbed my attention instantaneously. In the clear pocket where an ID would normally have been, there wasn’t one. Instead, there seemed to be a newspaper clipping in the place of the ID. The picture showed a young blonde girl with heart-shaped lips, and the most amazing blue eyes. The clipping read as follows:

Andrea W. Sky

Andrea Willow Sky was born December 6, 2003 to a single mother at the time Annabell Sky in Cleveland, Ohio. Andrea was murdered on May 8, 2019 by an unknown assailant, whom police have yet to catch or even identify. Cause of death seems to be blunt force trauma caused after the assailant drove Miss Sky into the wall of a nearby building. She hit the wall with a lot of force, so whoever was attacking her was out to kill. This was no accident. Reports say that Andrea was last seen with a close friend who has not been seen since the eve of her death. He is the prime suspect, but be cautious, we have reason to believe that this suspect is armed and seriously dangerous. Andrea’s death is a tragedy beyond many we have seen in recent years, but

always remember, she’ll only ever be as real as you want to make her.

I teared up as I read; I didn’t mean to do it. It just happened. The last line stood out the most. I had heard it so many times before. From Andrea herself in my dreams, from the police scanner in Cleveland. Why had this writer just randomly put it in his or her-- what was this even? A police report, obituary, little of both? Whatever the case, the writer knew the saying, but how?

I'm not really sure why I did this, but before I checked the money I closed the wallet and just looked at it. It was one of those impulse things that you'd do when you're excited about something and you're trying to cherish the anticipation. The wallet was faded-brown leather. It had tears at each corner and the fold was very creased, as if someone had folded it forward then backward, forward then backward, over and over again. It would have been impossible to do that now, for the wallet was too thick. Upon examining the front cover of the wallet, I noticed something that I hadn't noticed when picking the wallet up; engraved on the front of the wallet was a very faint and faded Christian cross. It had flat edges and sharp corners, and the bottom quadrant of the cross was double the length of the other three. The image was faded enough to miss at a glance, though impossible to overlook once it was seen.

I opened the wallet again and examined the inside. Each pocket on either side seemed to be pressed to the pocket behind it, as if nothing had been put in any pocket in a very long time. Moreover, in attempting to pry the pockets apart with my finger I found that every pocket had been sewn shut. Even the ID pocket, the one that had the newspaper clipping in it, was unopenable. Puzzled, I finally decided to check what was in the money pocket only to have my spirits flushed down a toilet as I heartbreakingly realized that the money pocket too, was sewn shut. A sigh of anguish left my body involuntarily, however, I still had hope, for there was definitely contents in the wallet, if only I had to open it.

I attempted to pry the wallet open with my hands for a time, but to no avail. I very quickly moved to trying to cut the wallet open with my fingernails, which, in hindsight, wouldn't have worked in my wildest of dreams because I had a habit of biting my fingernails when I became nervous, and lately they've been reduced to stubs. I then started looking on the ground of the city for sharp objects that I may be able to use as a cutting tool. I found many things: a fork with bent prongs, a large, green piece of glass beer bottle, a dirty old syringe(which I accidentally pricked myself with), and even a dull butcher's knife. None of these were able to cut the wallet open. After an hour of looking and trying, I sat down indian style against a building, feeling exasperated, and hopeless. Boog ran up to me, hopped into my lap, and laid his head down.

Then the hunger hit. It was the worst pain I had ever felt in my life. My stomach twisted and turned and writhed and wriggled. It growled like a lion about to pounce; like the Beast when he caught Belle in the room near his rose. Something was trying to get out of me; a full-grown tiger in a cage; 100 jelly fish in a net. It felt as if I was being zapped by a defibrillator and didn't have to be. I threw my stomach bile up all over Boog, and he began to whimper. I stood up quickly looking for something to use to wipe up Boog when a voice began to speak in my head.

You know what you must do, the loud booming voice said. *You have all the tools you need*, the voice added, then paused for a while during my own stunned silence, and continued, *I gave you the tools, everything you've done, I have done*.

Then, the voice went away, I felt it go away. Feeling oddly alone, even though Boog was still at my feet(covered in my puke), I pondered for a moment. *What the hell did that mean*, I thought. This person, or rather, disembodied voice, had given me my power? How? Did this voice have anything to with my recent, for lack of a better word, misfortune? Or, on a scarier note, does this voice have *everything* to do with my recent misfortune.

Hunger interrupted my thoughts. I really wanted that money. The voice said I had the tools, might as well see if this voice has any fruit in its punch. I took the wallet in hand and focused hard on the cross and then tried to pry it open with my mind. Nothing happened. I fell

to the ground, defeated. However, before I accepted my imminent death by starvation, an odd thought wiggled its way between my ears. When I tried to pry the wallet open with my mind, it never even pulled or attempted to move. The wallet stood complacent. I looked over at the wallet, that was now a few feet away from me, since I had thrown it down to the ground in frustration upon not being able to open with my power, and attempted to lift the wallet with my mind. Then my worst dreams came into fruition; I had lost my powers. They would not move the wallet no matter how hard I tried.

Red-hot tears started to roll down my face, leaving a trail of fire behind them. It was the last straw, frustration had overcome me. I screamed as loud as I could into the sky like a banshee and turned onto a brick building next to the sidewalk. I ran to it, wound back as far as I could, and punched the wall as hard as I could. The skin around my knuckles split open like a banana that was bent backwards. I looked at my now bloody and wounded hand and punched the wall again. And again. And again. And again.

"I... " another hit.

"...just..." another hit, my mind focused on the wallet full of money that I couldn't have.

"...need..." another hit, a crack cut through the air this time.

"...you..." another hit, white hot pain traveled up my arm.

"...TO..." another hit, this one jammed my pinky hard.

"...OPEN!!!!" a final hit, the hardest one. With this, I felt every bone in my right hand break. As frustration subsided, it was replaced by pain. Breathing heavily, I walked over to where Boog was sniffing by the wallet. I knelt down over the wallet, my tears falling onto the cement and I pet Boog with my good hand. It was a similar scene to the night when Andrea had died; a defeated kid kneeling over a dead dream. It was poetic, really. I looked down at the wallet and even more hopelessness settled into my mind.

"I just need you to open," I repeated in a whimper. But to my surprise, the wallet let out a small sound as I spoke. A sound of tearing, or of someone cutting through sewn string. I picked up the wallet, and the string that kept the wallet closed was now cut, revealing a fat stack of money in the money pocket. I pulled the money out as joy filled me, an utter contrast to the hopelessness I was feeling just a few moments before. I looked through the money in my hands; they were all \$100 bills. Every. Single. One. I counted the amount. There were 50 bills in all, which added up to a total of \$5,000. I was amazed. Overjoyed. Words couldn't have described the emotions I was feeling at that moment. The only thing I could do was look at Boog. "C'mon, boy, let's go get you some food."

Some time passed and I bought Boog and I some food. No food in particular, just food. I bought a whole bunch of food, but only spent \$100. I ate some of the food I bought, then I threw up all the food I ate, and ate some more. I also decided to rent a motel room, and to sneak Boog into it. We relaxed for the rest of the day and then I went to sleep. I had no dreams.

I woke in the middle of the night to searing pain in my hands. I had bought bandages, but that was only to stop the bleeding, every bone was still broken, and they were letting me know it. I got up out of bed and went into the bathroom, turned on the cold water of the faucet, and stuck my hand under it. The cooling helped the pain go away slightly, but I was still suffering. *This sucks, if only I could make this magically heal.* My thoughts stopped dead. What if there was a magical way I could heal my hand? The wallet had opened, and all I did was ask

it to. My powers hadn't worked when I was trying to lift the wallet, but maybe I was doing it wrong. Perhaps my powers had evolved from doing things with my mind, to making things happen with it. Maybe all I had to do was ask for something to be done, and would be done.

So, with all my focus on my hand broken, bruised, and bloody, I muttered the word "heal." Astonishment rose in me as the black and blue splotches began to disappear, slowly, but visibly so. Once the bruises had vanished, the cuts and the slices all over my hand closed up, leaving no signs that they were there in the first place. When the cuts were closed, I felt the bones in my hand snapping back into place like jigsaw pieces, or Legos fitting together.

Within 2 minutes, my hand felt almost completely healed, aside from some swelling and minor pain. It was amazing, but after my hand was healed, I began to get very tired, and decided to lay down and rest.

I woke under a white light, in an all white room. I was laying on a white floor that wasn't carpet, nor was it tile, or linoleum, or wood. It was floor, but not anything you could feel. It was there, but also not. Boog had gone, so it was only me in the room. Well, me and somebody else. A man. He was standing, oriented so that I could see his profile. A tall man he was, maybe 6'2", maybe 6'3", wearing an all white suit, egg-shell colored. He had Native-American colored skin with a white goatee. He was quite a handsome man, if I did say so myself. When the man saw me sit up, he looked over. Niceness was in his eyes; it was a look that begged to be trusted.

"Ahhh, you have awakened," the man said in a soft, pillowy, tone.

"Yeah," I answered. "Where am I? And who are you?"

"That's a curious inquiry, now isn't it?" asked the strange man in response to me.

"No. No actually it isn't," I responded with an attitude now, getting frustrated at the man's easy-goingness of the situation. "It's quite a simple question; where am I, who are you, and why am I here." I said the words as statements rather than as questions.

"It *is* interesting. Are you inquiring where your consciousness is, or where you are? This place is everywhere, and nowhere. As for me, I am everyone, and no one. " His voice was deep. It was intimidating, but not unnerving. I was confused by his words. I didn't understand what *he* was asking and I was still groggy from sleep. "Your body's still in your motel room with your dog, healing and safe."

"So... I'm dreaming?" I asked.

"Well, yes. In a manner of speaking. In a different manner of speaking, you are more awake than ever you have been."

"What? What the *hell* does that even mean, man?!" I asked, interrogatively, with my frustration building. "Cut the bullcrap, and stop speaking in riddles! Give me a straight answer or I swear to God I'll-" Suddenly the man grew large, and angry. His shadow in the room grew tenfold to the point where the darkness engulfed me. His eyes grew large, bold, and dark.

Filled with hate, the man said, "You'll *what*? Use your powers? On *me*!? You're a swine," the man finished with a snarled growl. My frustration was quickly turned to surprise and fear. "And how dare you use that name in vain. You know nothing of the power of what you call *God*. The one who is the father of all, of you; and of all your powers."

"What do you know of my powers?" I asked, ditching my attitude all together.

"Everything. I am the one who gave you your powers. And I can take them away." The man's anger was waning now, but he still spoke with no lack of malice. "I won't, however,

because you have posed a great entertainment for me.” My confusion continued to build until I was at a pinnacle feeling of bafflement.

“You’ve been watching me?” I asked, somewhat afraid.

“Dear boy,” he said, “I watch everybody.”

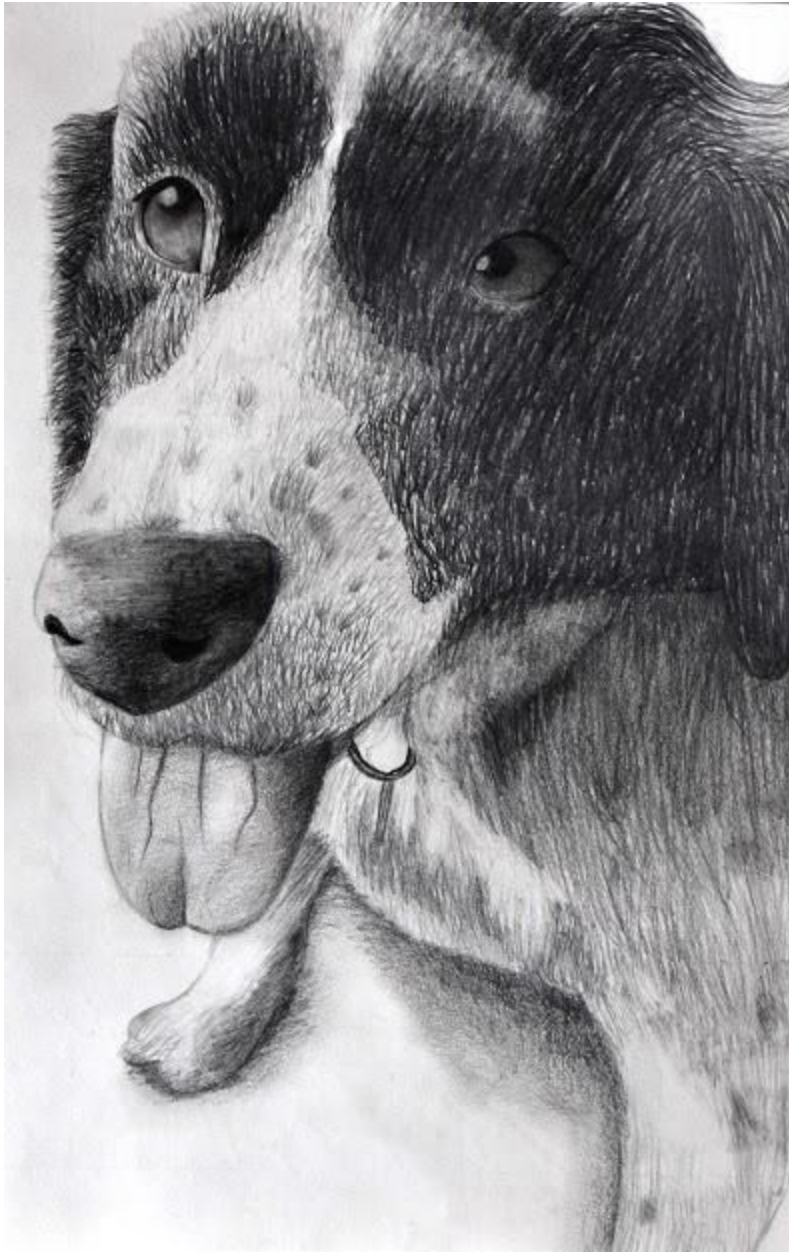
“Who *are* you?” I asked for a final time.

“I think you have already figured out the answer to that question.”

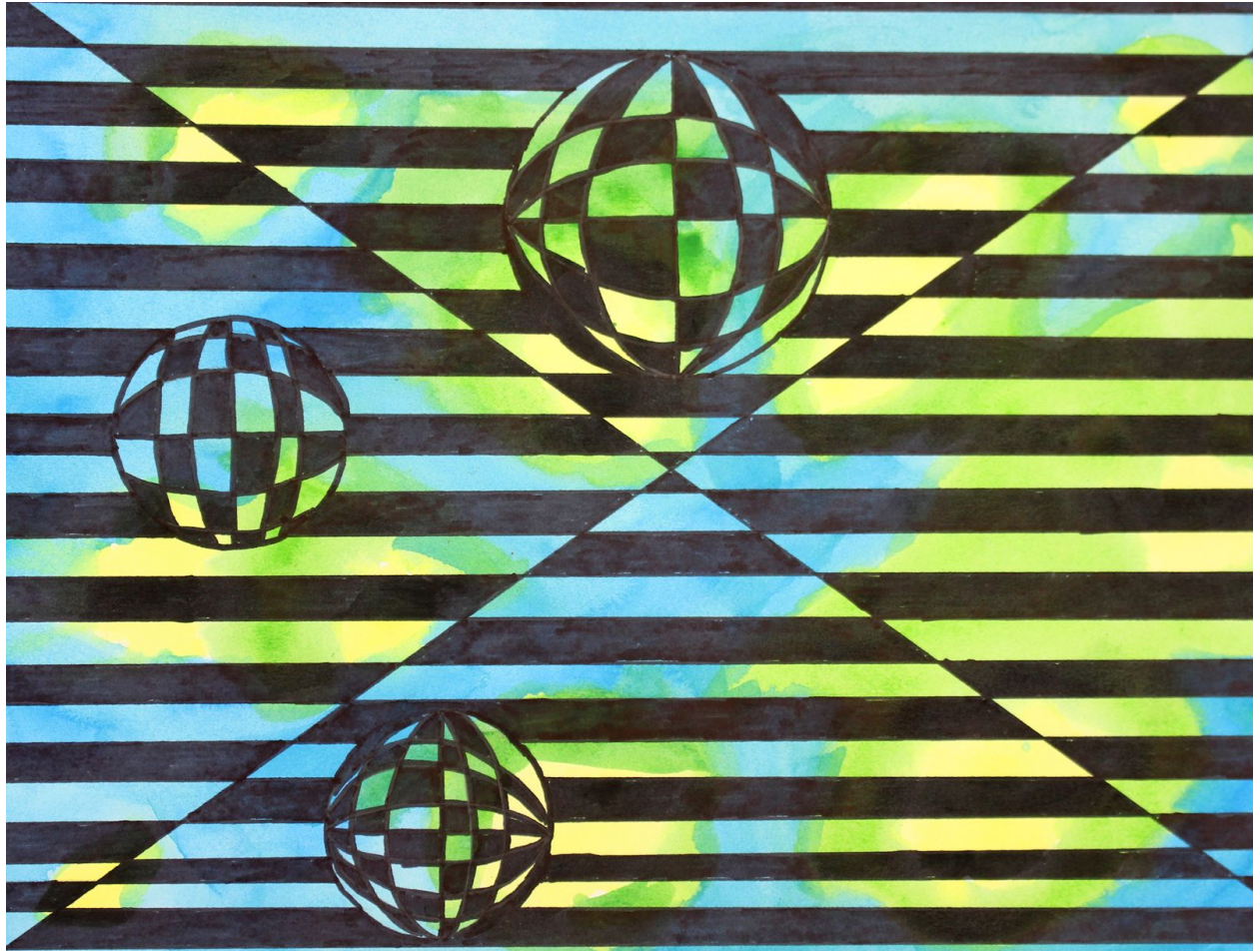
“You are God,” I said after a long pause.

“Yes, that is what humans call me, but everywhere else I am known simply as Lord. I am Lord.”

-James Yomtob









Meghalayan Mayhem

“They’re awake,” announced Jerry, the head of the genetic research team at Meghalayan labs.

The rest of the team was speechless as they stared in awe at the creatures behind the reinforced glass enclosure, the ones that they had worked tirelessly for the last duodecennial¹ to bring to life. The creatures were hideous: their pale, semi-translucent skin revealed a multitude of interconnected blue tubes; their large heads having two disproportionately large forward-facing eyes, which suggested intelligence and predatory instinct, but their small size and unimpressive build were hardly anything intimidating. However, they were nothing to be underestimated. The team had witnessed first-hand what marvels their kind were capable of, which is why they had sought to bring the creatures back from the abyss.

Many years ago, a team of archaeologists was sent to excavate the ruins of an ancient city of steel and asphalt, reduced to little more than rubble over time. It was a mediocre find at best, barely even good for scrap metal. Then they found the box. It was small, about nine claws² long, seven claws wide, and four claws high; and it contained the key to understanding this ancient race: a full catalogue of the language they called “English”, a collection of pictures of the creatures and their world, and most importantly, a genetic sample.

“What do we do with this?,” asked Deborah, the one who found the box.

Jerry, one of her closest friends on the team, paced around the room in thought.

¹ Duodecennium: a period of 12 years. Dinosaurs would use base 12 because they have 3 fingers on each hand and base 6 is too small to be effective.

² Claw: a unit of measure in the dinosaur world roughly equivalent to 3 inches

"I don't know, Deborah. It's intriguing! With this sample, we have the power to bring these creatures back, but should we? It just doesn't seem right to be playing God here."

Suddenly, the door opened with a violent slam, and Terrance, the muscle of the operation stomped into the room.

"You Troodons always overthink things! The answer is obvious: food. And what's food without a little entertainment as well? They're smart, that much we can tell. If they're half as smart as they seem, they should make an exquisite hunt."

"And you Tyrannosauruses always think with your stomach. Don't you think that's a little... extreme? Think of what we could learn from them. That is, if we even bring them back at all. We don't even know if it's possible," Jerry remarked.

"Not at all extreme," replied Terrance in his thick, gravelly voice. "Ever since the ethics commission made it illegal to eat other dinosaurs, we carnivores have had a hard time finding food. These puny mammals hardly provide enough sustenance to feed us all, and such a high demand has been driving prices through the roof. Think of it this way: if we go through with this, we will be rich! Everyone will want them both as food, and as prey. Their intelligence will only serve to enhance the hunt. It will be... like a game. It will be fun again."

After a brief moment of hesitation, Deborah spoke up. "We really have been feeling the lack of food recently. The mammals mostly burrow deep underground, and have you seen a dinosaur try to fish?! I hate to say it, but it looks like this is our best bet."

"If you say so," said Jerry, resigning himself to the idea.

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"What should we name them?" asked Deborah.

"Hmm... There were some birth certificates that we found at dig site 11, but they are only fragments. We could attempt to piece them together, but we can't guarantee anything," replied Jerry, rifling through the dig records.

After a few hours of fiddling with the ancient scraps of paper like a jigsaw puzzle, Jerry finally found pieces that fit together to form names. "Strange creatures these humans are. Well, I suppose we should respect their naming traditions. We will call one Jimothy, and the other Billiam."

As Jimothy and Billiam grew, the team realized that these beings weren't inherently smart and began to wonder how humans had been capable of such marvels. The only thing that even hinted at intelligence was their innate ability to learn. If only you could see the look on the faces of the Troodons when the humans started speaking their language.

"How are they doing this, Jerry? I thought all they could do was babble and lay around all day. They might be good for something after all!" Terrance, being a little more simpleminded than the Troodons, failed to realize that maybe, unlike dinosaurs, human children don't come ready-made in an egg but rather need to be nurtured to maturity.

"If they can learn, maybe we should teach them. The team at site 13 found some of their books. They seem to be a collection of historical accounts written by a man named William Shakespeare, who I must say has a most peculiar style of writing. Some of his works contain accounts of military victories, which should help prep them for the hunt. In addition, I propose that we teach them logic and linear algebra, all perfectly

necessary for any intelligent creature." And with that, Deborah volunteered herself as their tutor and mentor.

• • •

"Now, Jimmothy, tell me, who led the Norwegian invasion of Denmark?" requested Deborah from the front of their makeshift classroom. The room started off as a dismal shell with grey walls, sterile fluorescent lighting, and a makeshift bed of straw in the corner, but over time Deborah had added a few little things to make it a little more bearable. For example, after an herbology lesson to teach the humans about edible plants, Deborah had left a little garden towards the front of the room, which she justified as being a way to familiarize them with the plants that they would have to rely on while in the arena being hunted.

Jimmothy thought for a second and then replied, "Would that be Fortinbras, Deborah?"

"Correct! That will be all for today, boys." Deborah exited the room, and began walking back to her office when she ran into Terrance. Terrance had been working on the perfect arena for the hunt. He had come up with a large enclosed forest with plenty of dense underbrush for the humans to hide in. It had been decided that, to add an extra element of risk, and therefore an extra element of reward, the humans would be given primitive weapons and an hour's headstart to scout out the enclosure.

The past five years had been arduous but rewarding for Deborah. Where before she had been a lowly technician at a dig site, she was now an important part of what could prove to be a majorly successful operation. She had worked incredibly diligently to engineer the perfect prey, teaching them the skills they would need to know not only for

combat, but for being creative and intuitive thinkers. She had taken on the taxing role of mentor, and had started to take pride in her work. No, it was more than that: she had practically raised the humans. Could it be that it was them she was proud of too?

"Hello... I said 'are they almost ready,'" said Terrance, beginning to get annoyed. This suddenly snapped Deborah out of her reverey and she spun around to face Terrance again.

"Oh! Sorry. Yes, their training is almost complete. I have taught them to the best of my ability, and I believe that they shall make worthy opponents," replied Deborah in her normal, bubbly voice. However, what her voice hid her eyes betrayed.

"Good. You have taught them well, so there is no further reason for you to see them. I wouldn't want any sort of lingering connection that you feel for them to get in the way of progress," said Terrance accusingly.

Deborah looked as if there was something she wanted to say, but after a moment she just nodded her head and proceeded down the hall.

After Deborah left, Terrance made his way to the enclosure. At the sound of his booming footsteps, Billiam and Jimmothy woke with a start, anticipating another one of his outbursts which he would get after exceptionally taxing days and which always ended with him threatening to take them to the arena right then and slaughter them without mercy. When Terrance got to their cell, the humans were surprised not to see him sporting his usual scowl, and instead saw him looking almost giddy, which was much more terrifying.

"Well boys," Terrance said in a lazy drawl, "today's the day. To-day is the day!"

"What do you mean?" asked Billiam, confused.

"You mean Deborah didn't tell you?" gasped Terrance, pretending to be surprised. "It's time for the hunt. You will be given rudimentary weapons and a one hour head start, after which my fellow tyrannosaurs and I will track you down and hunt you. Simple as that! You have been prepared since birth for this purpose, and today it will be fulfilled. Now get ready; you enter the arena in an hour."

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The sunrise over the arena was absolutely breathtaking: hues of pink, yellow, orange, and blood-red spilled over the horizon and into the morning sky. Billiam and Jimmothy stared in awe, forgetting for a moment about the gruelling task ahead, and took in the wondrous sight. It was the first time in their lives that they had ever left the enclosure.

Weapons in hand, they ran together into the arena as Terrance and the other tyrannosaurs watched hungrily from the observation deck. They ran until they found a small creek carving its way through the center of the arena, its steep embankments creating a natural bottleneck, giving the two of them the best chance possible of defeating Terrance and his team. For the rest of their hour, they gathered materials to fortify their little ravine. It would be deep enough that Terrance wouldn't be able to attack from above and narrow enough that it would be difficult for him to turn around when he got in, but it also meant that the only way out for them would be to kill him and the rest of his team, which would be no easy feat. Although practically suicidal, it was the best plan they had.

A loud roar sounded throughout the arena, signalling the beginning of the hunt.

“They’re coming!,” yelled Jimmothy.

“So this is how it ends,”resigned Billiam. “This is how we die.”

“Don’t be so grim, Billiam. It will be like the Battle of Agincourt. Henry’s forces were outnumbered as bad as us, but their brilliant strategy and faith in Henry led them to victory.”

“But where’s our Henry, Jimmothy? The closest thing we even had to a friend in this world was Deborah, but where is she now, huh? She abandoned us, simple as that. She knew this was to be our fate; she raised us for slaughter. She’s worse than Terrance. At least he is up front with us and gives us the dignity of facing us like a warrior. She’s probably cowering away on the observation deck, too afraid to fight us in battle.”

“Don’t give up hope, Billiam, I’m sure she wouldn’t just leave us here to die.”

“In case you haven’t noticed Jimmothy, that is literally what she is doing.”

• • •

“I need your help, Jerry,” pleaded Deborah. “Terrance moved up his plans, the hunt is today! I don’t want to be a part of this sick joke anymore. We can find different food, we can find different entertainment. These are real, sentient beings we are talking about. They should be welcomed and cherished, not slaughtered; I know this now. Please, you have to help me get them out of there!”

“I want to help you, Deborah, I really do, but we are too late: Terrance and the humans are already in the arena, I’m afraid there is nothing that we can do,” replied Jerry empathetically.

“Please! There has to be something we can do. Maybe we could go into the arena ourselves. It’s risky, it’s daring, but it might be our only option.” Deborah knew that she was reaching for straws without even having opposable thumbs, but she knew that she would do it if it meant saving Jimmothy and Billiam.

“Okay, Deborah, I’m in.”

• • •

“Here they are,” shouted Terrance to his team. “I see they’ve set up camp in this ravine. Smart. But it’s not enough. Move in boys!”

As the pack of tyrannosaurs moved in on them, Jimmothy and Billiam readied themselves for what would likely be their first and last standoff. Spears raised, they glanced at each other for one last bit of reassurance, one last look shared before the end, and then they charged.

The battle that ensued was bloody and terrible, their meager spears being no match for the iron jaws of a Tyrannosaurus. Both sides charged at each other and when Billiam’s spear impaled the flesh of the first tyrannosaurus, he was reinvigorated with a newfound hope that maybe they could win. This hope was soon dashed when, after being unable to get his spear dislodged from his opponent’s flesh, another tyrannosaurus knocked him to the ground. The tyrannosaurus reared its head and let out a monstrous war-cry. However, before it could finish Billiam off, the tyrannosaur was set upon by none other than Deborah.

“You... you came back!” exclaimed Billiam, surprised to see Deborah, who he had thought to have betrayed him.

“Of course I did! I couldn’t just leave you here, now could I,” said Deborah while digging her claws into the eyes of her opponent.

“I thought that you were going to just give us over to Terrance...” Billiam was interrupted suddenly by Terrance’s booming voice.

“How dare you, Deborah! I knew you had gotten attached to these humans, but I didn’t know it was that much. I guess I’ll just have to kill you too, then. Oh well, more fun for me.”

Terrance butted his head into the side of Deborah’s opponent, causing Deborah to fall onto the ground. The force of Terrance’s head-butt caused the other, now dead, tyrannosaurus to fall backwards onto Deborah and pin her to the ground. No matter how much Deborah squirmed, she couldn’t get out from under the dead tyrannosaurus.

Just then, Jimmothy and Jerry, after killing the last of the other Tyrannosaurs, came to her aid, but it was too late. Terrance had Deborah’s head under his foot and began to slowly crush it.

“I’m going to enjoy this, Deborah,” gloated Terrance. “You Troodons were always weak. As always, your brain was your downfall. All this thinking of yours actually led you to think of these *animals* as friends. Well, these useless bags of flesh you call friends are powerless to help you now!”

Terrance lifted his foot up to stomp Deborah’s head, but before he could bring it down, Jerry mustered up every ounce of force in his body and rammed himself into Terrance, knocking him off balance. Terrance tried and failed to regain his balance, finally falling over right onto the blunt end of Billiam’s spear that was still sticking out of

the corpse of one of the other Tyrannosaurs. The force of the impact jammed the spear through the base of his neck and right into his brain, killing him instantly.

The others quickly rushed to Deborah's side, seeing if there was anything they could do to save her.

"Deborah, I'm sorry I doubted you," said Billiam. "I really thought you had abandoned us, but I guess I was just scared. Thank you for coming back for us."

"It's okay, Billiam, you've been through a lot. I'm sorry I got you into this whole mess. I was the one that brought you into this world, and I stupidly agreed to let them do this to you. I never expected you two to be the wonderful humans that you are..."

With that, Deborah let out a long sigh, the last of the breath escaping her lungs. Her eyes closed for the last time, and she was dead.

Jerry brought the two boys back into the facility, back to the enclosure, while he tried to figure out what to do with them.

"What would Deborah do?" he asked himself. "She would have wanted them to have a good life, but how? They'll never be able to integrate into our society, they're just too different. If only there were more of them, maybe they could go make their own civilization again."

With that, Jerry got an idea. He grabbed the rest of the genetic samples from the cryofreezer and made his way to the humans' enclosure.

"How would you guys like to go live on the moon?"

-Jonathan Mokry







Untitled

Part I

The bright sun snuck through the newly sprouted leaves as I chased Cooper through the woods.

"Can't you keep up with me, Arthur?" he called out tauntingly from just a few paces ahead. The arrogance of my friend was practically unnoticed by me at this point. Cooper had always been like this. With somewhat of a right to be. For all of our nine years of life, he had been the best at everything, the kid everyone on the base admired. He was faster, stronger, and smarter than all the other kids. He could pick up any game, intellectual or athletic, and be a master within the day. He knew he was good at it all, and he wasn't afraid to say it, me being his favorite person to remind. He bested me at everything. Even though I was no slouch in arithmetic, and could hold my own in a game of basketball, typically beating out the rest of our friends in both, I could never win against Cooper. Even though it stung deep down that I was always second best, I never let it show. I quietly continued my chase after Cooper, observing his strong, agile steps across the bumpy terrain.

With a jolt he stopped. I followed suit, looking around to learn why our adventure had ended. "Do you see that?" he asked, peering through the foliage at Route 37. It was the only way to enter or leave the base other than by foot, and traveling up the winding path was a fleet of moving vans. Cooper gave me a silent glance before he spun and was on his way home. Again I chased in silence, pondering what was happening. New families moved to the base every once in a while, but never with enough trucks to move everyone in the town.

We made it back to the living quarters and I gave Cooper a wordless wave as he shouted at me that we would meet up later.

I wandered into my kitchen, interrupting my mother and father's conversation.

"So you've seen the trucks?" he asked.

I nodded slowly.

"It's not a new family. Everyone on the base is leaving. A war has broken out. A Californian general has risen up and taken over everything east of Texas within the past 48 hours. They cut off all communication out of the area which is why we are just learning about it. We have to move to an active military site in order to prepare to help in the fight. I was asked to work alongside General Guardiola in New York. We leave at 7 tonight so get packing." My dad delivered the news in his typical emotionless fashion. His face was like stone, moving slowly and rigidly, however delivering the news quickly and matter-of-factly. He didn't sugarcoat anything and his stern expression was burned into me by his eyes, so dark the difference between the pupil and the iris was almost unnoticeable.

He left the room and I looked at my mother. Her golden hair and soft, gentle eyes were a comforting sight to me. She was absurdly short, at my eye level even when I was so young. She came over to me and gave me a reassuring hug that let me know everything would be ok. The type of warm love that only a mother can give her young child in a time of distress. "I'll start packing your stuff," she said. "Go and say goodbye to your friends and see if any of them are coming to New York with us."

"Thank you," I said quietly as I slid out the door and began walking back towards Cooper's. I was about halfway there when Cooper came sprinting around the corner.

"So, Arthur, where are you off to?" he yelled.

"New York," I responded, barely loud enough for him to hear.

People behind him must have seen the back of Cooper's head flash bright red suddenly, because Cooper stopped dead. He looked at me concerningly. "New York?" he inquired. I shook my head to assure he heard me correctly. "But that is on the other side. I'm going to San Francisco. My dad is good friends with General Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. My dad said it was about time that someone rose up against our horrible society, and that when Ole gave him the call, he was happy to join the rebellion."

I was at a loss for words, something Cooper never experienced. "Well I guess this is goodbye, but hey maybe if the war lasts long enough we can see each other on the battlefield." He said this with excitement and hope. Things that I couldn't feel.

"I hope it doesn't last that long" were the last words I said to my best friend.

Part II

It did last that long. Nine years later and the war was still raging. I had recently turned 18, and having grown up on a base all my life, all I knew was war and weaponry. It was now my turn to help protect my country. In New York, I no longer had Cooper outshining me in everything. I felt a sense of freedom. Now I was able to be the best. I was top of my class in every field, and was always the best in military combat training. This success gave me confidence, and while I was still a quiet kid, I carried myself with a much higher respect. General Guardiola recognized my success, and on my 18th birthday, he appointed me to command a fleet of ground troops. The hope was that the attack I was launching in Salt Lake City, Utah would take out all of the power supply of the rebels and enable us to quickly take back the rest of the land they had in their hands.

I shipped out the following day. After a loving goodbye with my mother who told me to be safe, and a stern handshake from my father who wished me luck and seemed to approve of what I was doing for the first time in my life, I entered the carrier plane and was off to Salt Lake City. I organized my troops to be ready as soon as we landed. Heavy, long range artillery in the back, with close combat soldiers in the front. The rebel base seemed to still be asleep, not expecting our arrival deep into their territory. We had the time and space, so I ordered an immediate attack on the base. Our rockets fired in fast succession until the base was a ball of fire. We then began our move towards the power supply, and once in range, our rockets were aimed, but only two fired. I looked back to see what the problem was, and what I saw shook me to my core. An entire fleet of tanks with a group of ground soldiers far larger than mine were coming up behind us. They had taken out the rest of our rockets before we could fire them.

The base we destroyed must have been a decoy. The fight became a frenzy of hand to hand combat between the two sides, no one willing to shoot in case of hitting their own forces. Battles were under way in every direction I looked, winners marching on to their next match while losers watched the events, motionless.

I was panicking. All I hoped for was that my attack was a success and the power supply was no longer functioning. I was looking at the power plant that would decide my fate as a general when an enemy came sprinting towards me, weapons drawn. What I didn't yet realize was those were the same strong, agile steps I had followed throughout my youth.

The enemy came in swinging and I blocked the attempt. He kept coming at me and I kept blocking and dodging, backing myself up until I was leaning against a massive rock. The man snickered and swung out. I ducked and heard him wince at the pain of his fist hitting the rock. I kicked his legs out from under him and went for another strike, but he rolled back to his feet before I could. From a few yards away I met the eyes of my opponent. We both had a revelation at the same time.

“Cooper?” I muttered barely audible over the battle that ensued behind me.

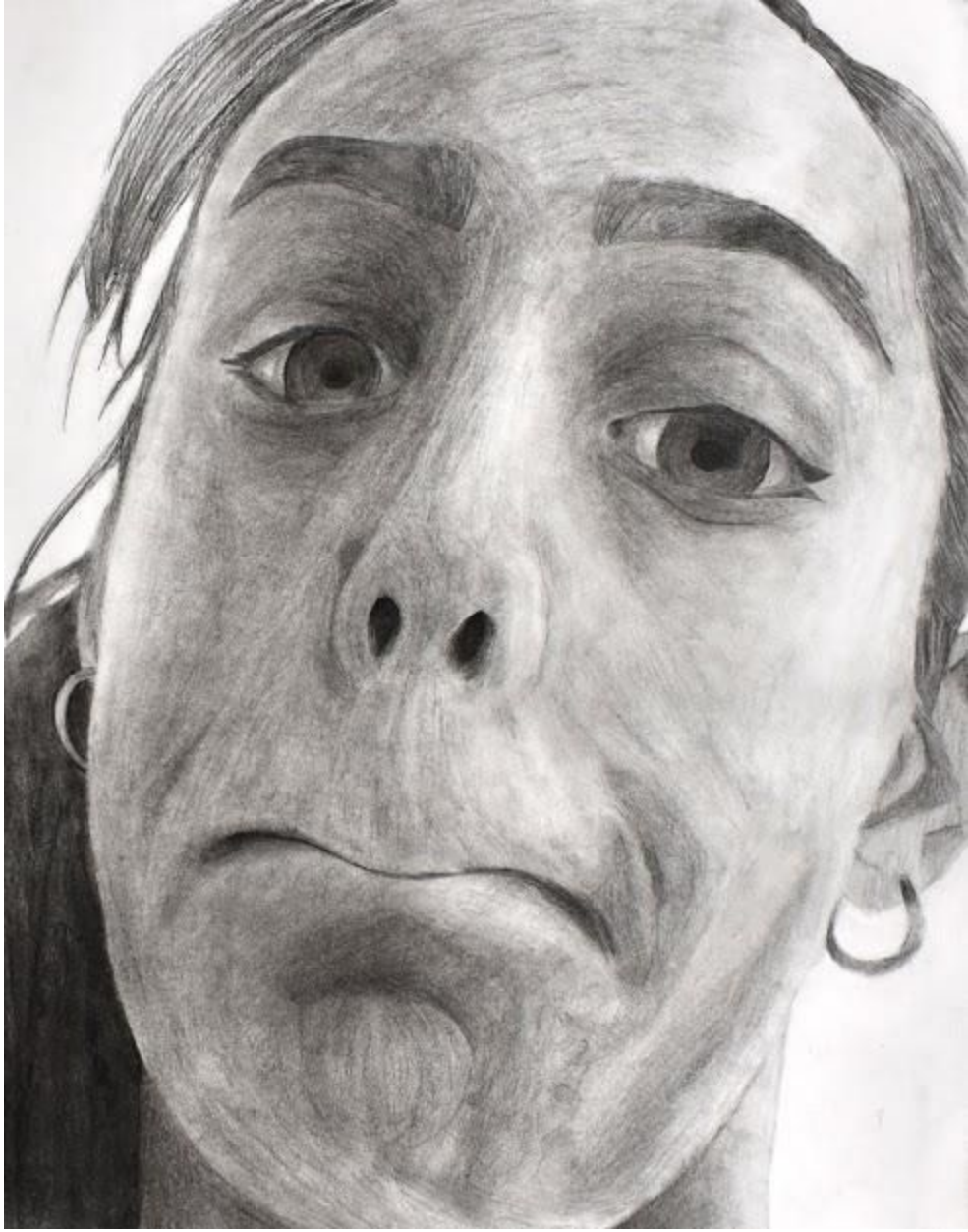
He gave me the same smile he had given me when we were kids, laughed, and charged at me again. My thoughts ran amuck in my head. I didn’t know how Cooper lacked any feeling for what he was doing. I continued fighting defensively, rarely delivering shots while I tried to gather what I was going to do. Cooper wasn’t my superior the way he used to be. I had a chip on my shoulder my whole life. I worked harder to become the best, while he coasted on his talent and didn’t improve at the same rate. The playing field was level. I couldn’t hold out for long if I didn’t fight back though. Everytime a clear point of attack opened for me, I either shied away, or delivered the blow softly. Cooper finally delivered a pivotal shot that knocked me onto my back. He began to laugh.

“I expected more from the only person who has ever been able to compete on a level close to me.” His voice carried the same patterns I had known so well, but it was different. It had grown dark and hard. A rasp had developed that made him seem much older and meaner than my childhood friend should have been. “I hoped we would meet again someday, just to once again prove my excellence to you.” He slowly marched towards me

“I don’t know how you’re able to do this,” I said, still dazed. “You are prepared to kill me while I can’t bring myself to hit you.”

“You are too soft.” He began to draw his knife as he said this. I stared into his cold eyes, pleading for him to not do this. I was still too taken aback by the blow to react to his inevitably fatal attack. Suddenly we heard an explosion. Cooper turned to see an explosion coming from the power plant. The rockets had worked! The entire thing was up in flames, the ball of fire growing rapidly. It was coming straight for us with no look of slowing down. The flames sprinted across the ground. I was watching my impending death coming towards me rapidly. Cooper looked back towards me and began to draw his knife again, but before he could, the flames got him. I watched my friends fate that would soon be mine, when suddenly, the flames stopped. Inches from my feet the flames began to crawl back towards the plant. The circle of the flames retracted all the way back to the plant into one small ball and then disappeared, leaving a sphere of destruction everywhere they had gone, including the grotesque remains of my childhood friend, whose knife was no longer drawn, ready to deliver my fatal blow.

-Jameson Andrews





November Cliff Dives

The silence of the night was bleak and unforgiving
I broke the silence, and into the cool water I jumped
As my head surfaced and broke water, the life within me stirred
And the cool water washed over me in waves
In due time there would be a fresh blanket of snow
But for now I was immersed in the burning tide

The chill pumped my adrenaline and I swam with the tide
Autumn in general was the best season to me even if the newfound chill in the air was too unforgivable
In truth, I couldn't wait for the snow
I couldn't wait to see the soft white coat on the sea cliff where I jump
The lonely white blanket killing the churn of the waves
Something about it made my heart stir

I love the way my heart yearned for that stirring
The way I was pulled to the tide
The way I was drawn in by the waves
I loved the sea and how it was so unforgiving
I loved the feeling of the jump
I loved the feeling of the air just before the snow

I would always wait for the snow
I would wait until the churning water made me stir
The water would await and blanket me when I jumped
I loved the feeling of the pulling of the tide
The water was indeed unforgiving
To the people pulled under the waves

I was always called to the waves,
Since birth.
I have always felt safe when there is new fallen snow
I have always been intrigued when the autumn sea forgives,
Me. I always feel as if the chilly water is hugging me, when it, around me stirs
I am a child of the tide
And a prisoner to the adrenaline of the jump.

When I feel the most free, I am jumping
The heavy November sea is crashing against me in waves
I am engulfed by the whirling tide
I am awaiting the winter snow

My heart is longing to feel, once again, the stir
And I am once again forgiven by the unforgiving.

-Julia Petersen

